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“Dum tacent Clamant.”



ORATION

BY

Chas. Eugene Clark,

DECORATION DAY,

Highland Cemetery, Covington, Ky.

May 30, 1912.

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MY FRIENDS:

We are met today in this beautiful court of peace, where rest in hallowed ground the beloved dead, to testify pursuant to an annual custom, the veneration of the living, for our departed loved ones, and especially to honor, so far as we can by our feeble efforts, the patriotic dead, the soldiers and sailors of the Union, who either died in battle for their country, or who having survived the horrors of war, have since been called hence to report "present" at the grand "roll-call" up yonder at the celestial reveille.

While we are especially met to honor the dead, we have happily spared to us and their country, by the mercy of Almighty God, living representatives of the Grand Armies of the Union, who are gathered with us to assist us in these solemn ceremonies.

And while they, too, testify their devotion and remembrance for their Comrades gone before, they are privileged to partake and experience the honor and veneration that awaits them, when they, too, shall have joined the great silent majority, and shall have been laid away by loving, tender hands in God's acre.

My friends, these ceremonies are most fitting and appropriate. For it has ever been an evidence and badge of a noble humanity for the survivors of all enlightened nations and people to mourn and venerate the dead, and to show especial honors to those patriotic heroes who died in the service of their country. For when engaged in such appropriate ceremonies the living, while honoring the heroic dead, also dedicate themselves to the cause of their country, and thus enlarge their patriotism and deepen their spirit of veneration.

While it is but natural that most men are patriotic, and are ever ready to do and dare at the call of their country in its hour of peril, yet often in the piping times of peace a people become careless and indifferent to that finer sense of duty, the due observance of which alone will perpetuate in its utmost purity, strength and vigor, their government and country, and enable it to serve and answer, in the largest measure, the purposes for which God hath fashioned it. And so we lay aside our ordinary business affairs on these days of national mourning and remembrance, and gather together at the graves of our beloved and heroic dead, and testify by our presence there, and by the solemn ceremonies that we hold there, our appreciation of them, of their sacrifices, and pledge our fealty and dedicate ourselves anew to the cause for which they died.

When we come to consider the mutations of government, and the struggle that has ever been made by all peoples, and especially by our own to attain that happy form of government and measure of freedom which we, as a nation, now and have

enjoyed for the last past 136 years, it is especially meet and fitting that we recount and venerate the sacrifices that have been made by our fellow countrymen during the various struggles in our national life and history.

The founders of this nation conceived high ideals of government, instituted and established to serve and bless the governed, bringing to them the largest possible liberty consistent with law and order, and the well being of society.

We were the natural inheritors of all the constitutional rights of the English people when we were colonists of Great Britain, including the rights and liberties secured to us under Magna Charta, the Bill of Rights, the Petition of Rights and all other constitutional guarantees under the English Crown.

The denial of many of these sacred guarantees caused our forefathers to rebel from the mother country and lead to the battles of the Revolution, and to our ultimate independence. Many patriots fell in establishing our independence.

After a few years of peace this nation was again forced to draw the sword and invoke the God of battles in the war of 1812, and establish anew our rights as a free and independent nation, to pursue our happiness and destiny as a member of the family of nations, circumscribing and squaring our actions only by the dictates of conscience and the law of nations. In the struggle, before the triumph of our cause and the declaration of peace, many patriots gave their lives for their country.

In the battles with the savages of the forests and prairies, and in the Mexican war, many more names were emblazoned on the rolls of the country's heroes, and many of these patriots lie in unnamed and forgotten graves and in a foreign land.

Then came our great Civil War, which for full four years threatened our very existence as a nation, rent asunder our land from the lakes to the gulf, and from ocean to ocean, and in which struggle countless battles were fought wherein more than two millions of men were engaged, brother striving with brother, citizen with citizen, each for the right as he saw it, wherein countless treasure was expended and tens of thousands of homes made desolate, while countless graves dotted the land throughout its length and breadth.

In this mighty struggle the high ideals for which our forefathers had labored, and for which our patriots had died, and on which humanity was depending, were well nigh lost. But by reason of the heroic efforts and sacrifices that were made by the government and the loyal people of the Union, and the undying deeds and prodigies of valor that were performed in the struggle, victory under the providence of God crowned the Union armies, and the swords were again fashioned into reaping hooks and other utensils of peace.

The countless heroes of this war, from both North and South—for we fought with a valiant foe—have emblazoned the history

and adorned the annals of our common country, and their deeds of valor will be rehearsed and sung so long as our nation shall endure, and though we differed in this great fratricidal strife, both the Blue and the Gray covered themselves with imperishable glory by their struggles and sacrifices in this greatest of all civic wars, and their heroism has arched the heavens from North to South with the rainbow of valor, circumscribing our common country, and guaranteeing its future hope and security, patriotism and peace.

In our endeavor to force the Spanish government to treat and deal humanely with its American possessions we were compelled to fight the Spanish-American war, and other heroes were added to our long and illustrious roll of patriots, and a new era was opened in our national life, when as the result of the fortunes of war we were compelled to take under our protecting power and flag, foreign peoples and possessions, and bring to them our ideals of government and civilization, and fit them for such self-government as will enable them to take their place among the civilized nations of the earth.

Because Shakespeare not only sorrowed, but rejoiced, he is called greater than Dante, who only sorrowed.

And so, though our country passed through the unspeakable horrors of four years of Civil War, yet this cruel war redeemed the land from the curse of human slavery, clarified our political atmosphere of such heresies that had attacked our national life, and brought a better and fuller understanding between all sections, and made us again a united people, one and inseparable.

The ravages of the Civil War have practically long since been forgotten, new generations have been born in the near half century that has passed since the thunder of battle has died away among the hills, and fields of carnage dyed with patriotic blood have brought forth abundantly the harvests of peace to bless and sustain a united country.

And as the fields that were once trampled with battle, saturated with blood, torn with the ruts of cannon, have again grown green, and show now only the blazonry and bloom of peace, so the hearts of men once torn with strife and contention have been washed of all bitterness, schisms have been forgotten, and a new nation has been born, whose only rivalry of section is that of high endeavor and noble enterprise.

This happy condition was had only at a fearful cost.

“But then God gives no value unto men
Unmatched by meed of labor,
And cost of worth has always been
The closest neighbor,
For from lowly woe springs lordly joy,
From humbler good, diviner,
The greater life must aye destroy,
And drink the minor.”

To those who fought, all honor; their names and their achievements will forever stand among the imperishable glories of their country, and will be venerated so long as patriotism is counted a virtue.

And so to you of the Grand Army, both living and dead, a grateful nation this day does homage—and all honor. It acknowledges by the memorial services this day held for its hallowed dead, and by the words of laudation of you and their achievements and sacrifices for the Republic, its undying attestation and appreciation of that spirit of patriotism and consecration to duty that led you forth to do and die for your country.

“And so fair womanhood in all its grace;
Proud manhood in its regal prime;
Sweet childhood with its angelic face,
And age with crown of silver prime.
Controlled by love’s resistless sway,
And guided by her heavenly powers,
Goes out to celebrate the day,
And glorify the graves with flowers.”

“And though, Comrades, many the changes since last you met,
Faces have brightened and tears have been wept,
And though friends have been scattered like roses in bloom,
Some at the bridal—most at the tomb.”

You may rest assured that as time shall speed us on with the efflux of years that this nation will ever hold you in kindly remembrance. Your heroic deeds shall remain imperishable in the hearts and traditions of your ever grateful countrymen. By your devotion to liberty and the cause of country and humanity you have attested the truth of the sentiment, “that each brave soldier has his war cry.” With one it may be home; another, country; a third, mankind; that each follows the same standard, that of duty; for each the same divine law reigns, that of self sacrifice; that to learn to love something more than one’s self is the secret of all that is great. To live for others is the aim of all noble souls. And as peace hath her battles and victories as well as those of war, it behooves us as citizens of this Republic, if we would prove ourselves worthy of our birthright, and would perpetuate the blessings of a free and enlightened government “of the people, for the people and by the people,” to our posterity, that we shall live up to our opportunity, recognize the responsibilities of government that go with the duty and dignity of citizenship, proclaim the sovereignty and majesty of the law, respect the inalienable rights and liberties of mankind, the work for that peace and prosperity that shall bless our common country with happiness and plenty, and make for its general weal, so then shall we be able to echo that proud boast of Livy, “that we are a nation of law as well as of men.”

So, then, shall we recognize that “justice is the bread of the nation, that it is always hungry for it, and that it is the insurance

we have upon our lives and property, and that obedience is the price we pay for it."

To achieve this happy condition, we must practice for ourselves and inculcate in the rising generation those grand tenets of ethics, government and religion, that will make of us men and women of irreproachable character and standing, pure and patriotic, just and generous, virtuous and forgiving, and make us fully conscious of the greatness and goodness of God, and of the blessings which we and they may enjoy under His divine favor.

We must inculcate in our daily life and character those virtues which admonish us to lead pure and honorable lives, which tend to peace on earth, and good will towards men, and that develop in both ourselves and the society around us all that is best, most fit and perfect, that apply our talents to the creation of works of beauty, grandeur and art, which in turn shall lift the lowly and degraded, educate the barbarian, enthuse the learned and sanctify the saint.

We must learn and teach the lessons of humanity, humility and love, the virtues of patience and obedience, the dignity and worth of labor, acquire self-command, and learn to triumph over adversity.

For then shall we acquire and inculcate those cardinal virtues which in truth lie at the foundation of all good and true government and society. As we shall love our neighbor as ourself, and do unto others as we would that they should do unto us, so shall we make it possible for the establishment of the home and family, and the prevalence of such doctrines as protect the weak against the strong, and make for the existence of free and enlightened government and communities of happy and contented peoples.

If we will so interpret our conduct we shall ever perpetuate our country and its glorious institutions to bless mankind, and we, together with our posterity, shall enjoy the full compliment of noble lives, replete with duties fulfilled, high aims, lofty aspirations and holy pleasures.

For we shall then elevate the *better* above the *grosser* man, and obtain those high ideals in government, in national and domestic life, that shall redound to greatest usefulness and glory, and lead to and make for a most worthy civilization—one that shall long live in the annals of mankind, and prove most worthy of emulation.

While striving for God and country may we ever prove worthy of that land and those ideals for which Washington fought and Lincoln died.

CHAS. EUGENE CLARK.

Decoration Day, May 30, 1912.

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